

The New York Times published [a heartbreaking story](#) this weekend about a young woman who was left paralyzed by a food borne illness. The article should be a wake-up call to all Americans about how the food whose safety we take for granted is produced.

Although the Times story focused on how beef is prepared for human consumption, there is a direct correlation to the inhumane conditions in which animals are kept and the prevalence of e coli. For me, I'd like to see changes made in all aspects of this field.

Effective antibiotics are one of our last lines of defense against food borne illnesses, but overuse of these drugs in livestock is rapidly depleting our arsenal by creating resistant strains of previously treatable bacteria. Last week, experts at the Danish Technical Institute wrote to many Members of Congress, including me, about their country's experience phasing out non-therapeutic antibiotic (NTA) use. Their results are dramatic and encouraging, and help refute many of the criticisms that my bill has faced.

In March, I introduced [H.R. 1549, the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act \(PAMTA\)](#), which currently has fifty cosponsors. This bill would ensure that we preserve the effectiveness of antibiotics for the treatment of human diseases by restricting the non-therapeutic use of antibiotics in livestock. E. coli. O157:H7, the strain that caused the illnesses profiled in the New York Times, cannot be treated with antibiotics, and it offers a disturbing example of how virulent bacteria can be without the modern medicines we take for granted.

In the letter, the experts at DTI outlined their findings that for all measures, phasing out NTA had either positive or neutral affects:

- The Danish swine production has increased from 18.4 millions in 1992 to 27.1 millions in 2008; a 47 percent increase.
- Productivity increased continuously before and after NTA stop
- Weaner mortality increased before and a few years after NTA stop – the rate seemed unaffected, except the first year after the ban. Mortality has improved considerably in recent years (management)
- Weaner average daily gain decreased until and increased after NTA stop (continuously during a decade).
- Total antimicrobial consumption has fluctuated over time, but has in summary decreased from 100.4 to 48.9 mg/Kg pork produced; a 51 percent reduction.
- **Major reductions in resistance among animal pathogens, indicator bacteria and**

zoonotic bacteria

- **Percent dead broilers in total (mortality): increased until and decreased after NTA withdrawal. Positively affected.**

You can [view the full letter and its findings on my site](#) .

These results show that stopping NTA makes livestock healthier without reducing livestock's growth, and can even increase farmer's production. Even more exciting is the finding that stopping NTA doesn't just stop the rise of resistant bacteria, it actually decreases their prevalence.

We need to rein in the unnecessary use of these drugs to reduce the prevalence of resistant bacteria and preserve the use of these important medications for when they are needed most.

If you're interested in more information on this issue, I recently [spoke on the House floor](#) in support of PAMTA, and [wrote to President Obama](#) urging his support.